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"Cousin Jeff" Johnson to Speak at EIU Banquet

Jan-25-2006

"Cousin Jeff" Johnson, host and producer of BET's "The Cousin Jeff Chronicles," will speak at this year's annual African-American Heritage Celebration banquet, being held on the campus of Eastern Illinois University.

The banquet will begin with a 5 p.m. social hour, followed by dinner at 6, on Friday, Feb. 3, in the Grand Ballroom of the Martin Luther King Jr. University Union. Tickets, priced at \$15 for the general public and \$8 for students, are available through Jan. 31 at the Office of Minority Affairs (581-6690), located in the basement of Ninth Street Hall. No credit cards accepted.

This year's banquet menu is scheduled to include roast beef, fried chicken, green beans, blackeyed peas, white rice, sweet potatoes, green salad and warm peach and apple cobbler, according to Joycelynn Phillips, an event organizer.

And the choice of "Cousin Jeff" as this year's guest speaker was a deliberate decision, she added, noting that the AAHC Committee decided to add a more "serious" tone to the banquet. Johnson has been a leader in teaching social responsibility to today's young people, and in getting students to vote.

Thus, in conjunction with "Cousin Jeff's" visit, the committee will also sponsor a Rosa Parks Memorial Voter Registration Drive from 5 to 6 p.m. the night of the banquet in the Alumni Lounge, located just outside of EIU's Grand Ballroom.

In addition to "The Cousin Jeff Chronicles," a series of mini-documentaries that tell the stories of black and Latino communities, Johnson can be seen weekly on "Rap City," engaging and enlightening a nation of young viewers on important political and social issues affecting their communities. He also does segments on BET's "106 & Park" and "Access Granted."

Johnson is an AME minister, public speaker and former vice president of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network, a political empowerment organization chaired by Russell Simmons. He works "diligently and tirelessly to encourage the Hip-Hop generation to utilize its political and social voice."

Formerly the national director of the NAACP Youth and College Division, Johnson was responsible for more than 700 youth units, representing 60,000-plus young people. Under his leadership, the division created the Phoenix Units, chapters dedicated to providing encouragement to incarcerated youth, and expanded its leadership training component.